



# **For the Uninitiated: How to Succeed in Classroom**

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**With the right techniques and a little practice, novice teachers can triumph over even the most problematic aspects of classroom management.**

"What can I do to control disruptive students?"

"How can I get students to stop talking during instruction?"

"I seem to be spending more time on discipline than on instruction. What am I doing wrong?"

These questions are common among new teachers. Novice teachers often feel overwhelmed and unprepared as they ready themselves for their own classrooms. Even the most confident and self-assured new teachers have questions

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arise, experience uncertainties and, like veteran educators, find themselves feeling confused and clueless at times.

While experienced teachers know that the sun will shine tomorrow, neophytes often are unsure whether the morning even will arrive. Unfortunately, many novices leave the profession because their feelings of confusion and frustration are never fully addressed. They exit the classroom doubting their abilities and questioning their preparation (Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin 2004). Consequently, many educator preparation programs are searching for ways to assist novice teachers.

As part of the Novice Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) implemented at all universities in The Texas State University System, Sam Houston State University faculty members work with novice teachers in four public school districts. They serve as mentors—observing, advising, encouraging, celebrating, and commiserating with the teachers. In addition, teachers participate in seminars that provide opportunities for sharing experiences and discussion.

During each seminar, novice teachers write their concerns or questions on exit slips. This feedback helps to determine topics for future seminars. In the first year that Sam Houston State University conducted its NTIP, nearly 1,200 slips were collected. Of these, more than 50 percent cited two aspects of classroom management as the most problematic: procedures and behavior management.

Even though educator preparation programs typically provide instruction in classroom management, more often than not, students fail to comprehend the complexities until they are solely responsible for a classroom. This article examines procedures and behavior management and offers suggestions that have proven effective. The authors hope to let the neophytes know that they are not alone in their concerns; there are steps and measures they can take to alleviate problems dealing with classroom management; and the sun will come up again tomorrow—honestly!

## Classroom Management

Classroom management consists of a wide array of proactive, well-established, and consistent techniques and practices. For teachers to relate content effectively, classrooms must be well managed. Curriculum preparation and behavior management have a close relationship.

Many first-year teachers feel fairly competent in their content areas and comfortable in instructional techniques. It's classroom management that has them concerned. Novice teachers must administer, supervise, direct, and control students, paperwork, room arrangement, recess, parent contact, and emergencies—as well as teach. They also must regulate the use of learning supplies, textbooks, and school supplies. Though this charge may seem impossible, with the right techniques and a little practice, a well-managed classroom with effective procedures and behavior management techniques is not just a possibility, but a probability.

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## Procedures

Classroom procedures are those practices—different from classroom rules—that clearly and precisely communicate behavioral expectations for specific situations. Canter (1992) described three main types of procedures, which are discussed here: academic, routine, and special.

### Academic Procedures

Academic procedures are important for tasks such as taking a test, getting the teacher's attention, and participating in class discussions. For example, while assessment is vital to gauging students' knowledge level, specific procedures are necessary to be successful. These include where and how students will turn in their tests and what students are supposed to do after completing the test.

**Planning.** Beginners need to ensure that each lesson is based on standards to be taught and students' learning needs. Then, they must mentally run through the lesson presentation and anticipate student performance and behavior so that they can amend the lesson plan when problems arise. Lesson planning should include transitions. If a lesson involves students moving around the room, plans should include procedures for traffic flow as well as for moving quickly and efficiently from one activity to another. The last step of planning is gathering all necessary papers and materials so that they are easily accessible before the lesson begins.

**Implementing planning.** Not only should teachers post daily objectives in a location where students can refer to them, but also students should be able to explain why they are learning the specific material and how they can use it. In addition, effective teachers use detailed plans as a reference rather than scripts. New teachers should practice so that they become comfortable without reading their presentations. To aid students, teachers should provide the following:

- detailed written (chalkboard, overhead, or handout) and oral instructions for the tasks they are assigned;
- expectations for class discussions (e.g., only one person speaks at a time; students listen intently and take turns speaking) and small group discussions (assign jobs for a smoother discussion—leader, facilitator, recorder, and timekeeper); and
- methods for appropriately gaining the teacher's attention—raised hand, paper cup on top of computer, some form of "flag" (e.g., a brightly colored index card that the student places on the desk).

**Assessing.** Formal assessment includes paper-pencil tests, student presentations, and other evaluation techniques that require a number grade as part of the student's record. Informal assessment refers to an ongoing process that teachers implement to document a student's

academic performance between formal testing situations. This documentation assists teachers in recording the intricacies of individual learning needs and in preparing appropriate instruction that facilitates all students' learning.

- **Formal assessment.** When testing, communicate rules for the testing environment (e.g., avoid talking or distracting noises, follow procedures to sharpen a pencil, use folders as "screens" to discourage roving eyes). Plus, before distributing the test, prepare students for what to do after completing it. Are they supposed to finish their homework, read a story, or work in small groups on their presentations? For student presentations, establish written expectations for good audience behavior.

- **Informal assessment.** This format requires acute observation skills. Teachers must observe and document areas in which students are knowledgeable and where they need assistance—both as a group and individually. This documentation, which can be kept easily on a spreadsheet, must include all students' names as well as the various elements that indicate whether or not a student is grasping each concept.

**Evaluating.** To improve instruction, new teachers must analyze the effectiveness and efficiency of their planning, implementation, and assessment of lessons. Effective teachers document problems encountered, record necessary changes for next time, and note new ideas discovered while reflecting on the lesson. This detailed analysis can be done throughout the process or immediately afterward. Before planning future lessons, these reflections should be reviewed to avoid similar problems.

### Routine Procedures

Routine procedures address arriving in and exiting the classroom, making transitions, turning in homework, and going to the restroom. Daily routine procedures, such as keeping supplies organized and handling paperwork, literally can make the difference between a smooth-running classroom and one that seems disjointed.

**Transitions.** These procedures begin on day one. Therefore, plan these transitions before school starts, introduce them the first day, and be consistent throughout the year.

- Establish expectations for appropriate activities when assigned work is completed. Define and communicate "appropriate." Some ideas include reinforcement activities related to content being taught and peer tutoring opportunities. Have specific classroom locations for these activities and communicate the rules.
- New teachers must decide whether students will

have regularly scheduled restroom breaks, go to the restroom on an as-needed basis, or both. When using a group schedule, students must stay productive while waiting for others—read a book or do assigned homework. In addition, these breaks should be planned at the same time each day. That way, students can anticipate the timing and minimize their in-between trips. For unscheduled trips, keep bathroom passes (laminated *boys* and *girls* on yarn or string) near the door.

- Students should be taught to be quiet and listen to instructions for lining up to move to another location, such as lunch, the science lab, or recess. Several techniques include lining up by group number, table, clothing color, or birthday months.

**Organization.** Lack of appropriate preplanning will become more shockingly apparent as the year progresses. The best results in organization come from thoroughly preplanning, effectively implementing, and consistently monitoring.

- **Classroom supplies.** Consider these questions when organizing the classroom. Where will supplies be stored? How will students access them? How and where will activities take place? Position supplies so that students will not be required to move often to obtain them.
- **Expectations for classroom cleanliness.** Students come from homes with various levels of cleanliness. New teachers must establish, from the beginning, student responsibilities regarding classroom cleanliness, and students must be involved in the process on a rotating basis. Perhaps have assigned students spin a wheel to determine their weekly duties (e.g., pushing in chairs, erasing the chalkboards).

**Paperwork.** Once again, the process of planning, implementing, and monitoring can help new teachers find the paper trail's end.

- In-boxes, located on a table or attached to the wall near the teacher's desk, keep loose papers better organized. These can be used to turn in homework, return papers from home, and collect weekly folders and permission slips. When in-boxes are marked clearly with what should go in them, stray papers diminish.
- Design a system to gather missed assignments from absent students, and designate a location where students know to check. For example, some teachers laminate a poster board and add students' names to it when individuals need to complete makeup work. While distributing handouts for an assignment, simply put the absent student's materials in that location, where the student can retrieve it.
- Elementary school lunch count tasks can be delegated

in age-appropriate ways. Whereas younger students can move personalized clothespins to their menu choices, older students can record a hand count of lunch-menu items.

- Clothespins also can be useful when checking attendance. A simple check can determine whose pin has not been moved. Other attendance techniques are glancing around the room to recognize which established groups have fewer students than they should and designing a buddy system where students help report absences.

Being proactive in behavior management from the start is much easier and more productive than reacting when misbehaviors occur.

## Special Procedures

Special procedures include fire and disaster drills. Detailed procedures must be taught, modeled, practiced, and frequently reviewed. When students understand and follow procedures, the need for corrective management is decreased.

Students should practice fire and emergency drills before they occur. They need to know who starts the line and not make a mad dash when the alarm sounds. The last student out typically turns off the light and shuts the door. You should remember to take the grade book out of the classroom during any drill.

## Behavior Management

Effective behavior management is not “what teachers do to stifle misbehavior when it occurs” (Charles 2001). This implies a reactive, rather than a proactive approach. Additionally, effective behavior management should not “rely on elements of fear backed by force” (Charles 2001). Instead, it should be considerate, respectful, and helpful. Finally, effective behavior management is not a skill teachers automatically know. Without training and practice in various management models, novice teachers often discipline and punish rather than manage.

Being proactive in behavior management from the start is much easier and more productive than reacting when misbehaviors occur (Burden 2003). Consciously practicing body language techniques and proximity control

helps maintain classroom order (Cangeliosi 2004). To set expectations and reinforce them successfully, three steps are critical:

1. **Clearly communicate** the classroom behavioral expectations. Allow students to ask questions so that they have clear understanding.
2. **Model** the behavior. Demonstrate what showing respect to others means. If students are expected to show respect for others, it should be given to them.
3. Include **positive reinforcement**. Students want peer recognition when they meet expectations, and they should be recognized. A simple verbal acknowledgment from the teacher is, most times, all that is necessary.

## Special Situations

When expectations are clearly communicated, modeled, and reinforced, disruptions still occur in the classroom. Some special situations call for an even more proactive approach to achieve desired results.

**Threats.** Stop threatening; take action when a student will not stop misbehaving. Communicate consequences and follow through. Novices must clearly explain what consequences will be enforced and consistently implement them. Teachers should have increasingly serious outcomes for the student who continues to misbehave.

**Student responsibility for behavior.** Teach students that they are responsible and in control of their behavior. Other students may influence them, but, ultimately, each student must learn to make the right choices and not blame someone else. If students are offended by others, they should use proper steps to solve the problem and not simply react. As teachers, we must give our students options for how to handle various situations.

**Specific behavior management techniques.** A few general approaches to a reward system include using a marble jar, point system, tickets, an individual contract, and a behavior chart. With the first two, the students as a whole are involved in the positive or negative consequences of the group's behavior.

- The rewards with the marble jar come when the jar is completely full. To earn a marble, students must be on task, help another, or follow specific instructions. Because filling the jar takes several weeks, students learn delayed gratification. The point system also is used for the entire class. Rewards can be presented daily, weekly, monthly, or per semester. When the class, as a group, exceeds the basic expectations for classroom behavior, points are assigned. The teacher establishes the various levels of points associated with rewards (e.g., 10 points for extra recess or computer time, 75 points for a visit to the museum), or sometimes lets the class decide how points will be spent.

- The ticket system is best with individuals. This system's rewards can be daily, weekly, monthly, or by semester depending on the students' ages and how long they can wait without a reward before becoming discouraged. These tickets can be purchased at an office supply store or teacher-made. When a student demonstrates positive behavior or exceeds expectations, a ticket is the reward. The student will "buy" something with the accumulated tickets, such as CDs, pencils, and calculators. Often, business owners will donate these items so that the money is not always coming from the teacher's check book.
- For students who need more consistent monitoring, a contract or daily behavior chart can be effective. These can be individualized to meet specific student needs and include daily or weekly rewards selected according to the student's age and interests. While some individuals enjoy a simple smiley face on a chart, others may receive a weekly trip to the treasure box. When one high school class was asked what rewards they preferred, several mentioned leaving five seconds early for lunch. They wanted to be first in line so that they would have a longer time period to visit with friends. Whatever techniques the teacher selects can help shape the student's behavior.

## Concluding Thoughts

Two particular aspects of classroom management—procedures and behavior management—can be especially challenging for novice teachers. Yet, there are practical ways to address these issues. Teachers who establish different types of procedures, (e.g., academic, routine, and special) and teach these routines greatly reduce the possibility of confusion and off-task behavior. By recognizing that behavior management must involve a proactive rather than a reactive approach, teachers find that many potential problems or challenges can be prevented.

Is there a panacea for every experience that involves managing a classroom? Certainly not. Teaching entails working with human beings, and people are by nature unpredictable. However, experienced teachers know that being organized helps solve classroom management issues, and novice teachers, once they implement their plans, begin to see new sunny mornings. □

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